

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Act of 2018*, WC Docket No. 18-336, Third Report and Order and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (October 17, 2024).

The 988 Lifeline is made of up more than 200 crisis centers across the country. Last week, I was fortunate enough to visit one of them.

Lines for Life in Portland, Oregon is dedicated to preventing substance abuse and suicide and promoting mental wellness through intervention, prevention, and advocacy. As the largest 988 center in Oregon, it fields calls from 34 of the state's 36 counties. Through the power of its 270 employees, 90 full-time call responders, and 80 volunteers, Lines for Life effectively responds to more than 60,000 calls per year.

On my visit, I had the chance to speak with Debbie. She started out as a volunteer, and has handled thousands of calls over the years – the most at Lines for Life. Now she's one of the center's leaders, and helps train other call takers. Debbie told me about the necessity of matching 988 callers with local responders, saying “we have our fingers on the pulse of the mental health resources in the area.” Without missing a beat, her coworker Alexis added that “we have it on a county-by-county basis.” Through their years of experience, Debbie, Alexis, and the entire Lines for Life team know the best way to help someone in crisis is to connect them with the resources right in their own community. Whether that's mental health counseling, addiction services, or housing resources, the Lines for Life team is best prepared to match callers with the local assets most equipped to assist a caller.

That's why the action we're taking today is so important. It will make sure that the many, many Americans who reach out to 988 on what could be the darkest day of their life are heard by local counselors like Debbie and Alexis, who understand what they are going through and know how to get them the resources they need the most.

The Lines for Life team also highlighted their work with the numerous tribes that live in the Pacific Northwest. However, their description of their efforts here had a familiar refrain: the lack of connectivity on Tribal land limits Lines for Life's ability to recommend certain resources, like virtual therapy or other telehealth options. We must ensure that all Americans have access to high-speed internet.

Lines for Life also operates the innovative Youthline service, a free teen-to-teen crisis support and help line. Youthline connects teens and young adults to trained peers that help address everything from anxiety and loneliness to sexual orientation to depression and suicidal ideation. At Youthline, I spoke with Morgan, a manager who told me the center's young volunteers impressed her every single day with “their capacity for compassion, understanding, and healing.” I had the privilege to sit down with one of those volunteers named Julie. I asked her why she got involved with Youthline and her response was something I'll never forget. She said she volunteered because she wanted to “help kids understand that they are not broken.”

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Thank you to the Chairwoman, and to all of the Commission staff who worked on this item. It has my full support.